

The Grand Manner Has Vanished from Pianists

James Huneker Says You Can Count on One Hand the Artists Who Have It—Famous Players Whose Names Are Writ in Ivory



Paderewski in his earlier days.
PHOTO BY DAVIS ESANFORD



Eugen d'Albert as a young man.



Vladimir de Pachmann



Josef Hofmann as a boy prodigy.
PHOTO BY FALK



Sophie Menter at the height of her career.

the standard of virtuosity is higher than, it was a quarter of a century ago. Girls give recitals with programs that are staggering. The Chopin concertos now occupy the position, technically speaking, of the Hummel and Mendelssohn concertos. Every one plays Chopin as a matter of course, and, with a few exceptions, badly. Yes, Felix Leifels is right; no one plays the piano badly, yet new Rubinsteins do not materialize.

The year of the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, 1876, was a memorable one for visiting pianists. I heard not only Hans von Bülow, but also two beautiful women, one at the apex of her artistic career, Annette Essipoff, (or Essipowa,) and Teresa Carreno, just starting on her triumphal road to fame. Essipowa was later the wife of Leschetizky—maybe she was married then—and she was the most poetic of all women pianists that I have heard. Clara Schumann was as musical, but she was aged when I listened to her. Essipowa played Chopin as only a Russian can. They are all Slavs, these Poles and Russians, and no other nation, except the Hungarian, can interpret Chopin. Probably the greatest German virtuoso was Adolf Henselt, Bavarian born, being a resident in Petrograd. He had a Chopin-like temperament and played that master's music so well that Schumann called him the "German Chopin." Essipowa, I need hardly tell you, communicated no little of her gracious charm to Paderewski. He learned more from her plastic style than from all the precepts of Leschetizky.

On a hot night in 1876, and in old Association Hall, I first saw and heard Teresa (then Teresita) Carreno. I say "saw" advisedly, for she was a blooming girl, and at the time shared the distinction with Adelaide Neilson and Mrs. Scott-Siddons of being one of the three most beautiful women on the stage. Carreno today, still vital, still handsome, and still the conquering artist, was in that faraway day fresh from Venezuela, a pupil of Gottschalk and Anton Rubinstein. She wore a scarlet gown, as fiery as her playing, and when I wish to recall her I close my eyes and straightway as if in a scarlet mist I see her, hear her; for her playing has always been scarlet to me, as Rubinstein's is golden, and Joseffy's silvery.

Eugen d'Albert, surely the greatest of Scotch pianists—he was born at Glasgow, though musically educated in London—is another heaven-stormer. I heard him in Berlin four years ago, at Philharmonic Hall, and people stood up in their excitement—Liszt redivivus!

It was the grand manner in its most chaotic form. A musical volcano belching up lava, scoriae, rocks, hunks of Beethoven—the Appassionata Sonata it happened to be—while the infuriated little Vulcan threw emotional fuel into his furnace. The unfortunate instrument must have been a mass of splintered steel, wood, and wire after the giant had finished. It was a magnificent spectacle, and the music glorious. Eugen d'Albert, whether he is or isn't the son of Karl Tausig—as Weimar gossip had it;

HERE lies one whose name is writ in ivory! might be the epigraph of every great pianist's life; and the ivory is about as perdurable stuff as the water in which is written the epitaph of John Keats. Despite cunning reproductive contrivances the executive musician has no more chance of lasting fame than the actor. The career of both is brief, but brilliant. Glory, then, is largely a question of memory, and when the contemporaries of a tonal artist pass away then he has no existence except in the biographical dictionaries. Creative, not interpretative, art endures. Better be "immortal" while you are alive, which wish may account for the number of young men who write their memoirs while their cheeks are still virginal of beards, while the pianist or violinist plays his autobiography, and this may be some compensation for the eternal injustice manifested in matters mundane.

Whosoever heard the lionlike velvet paws of Anton Rubinstein caress the keyboard shall never forget the music. He is the greatest pianist in my long and varied list. A mountain of fire blown skyward, when the elemental in his profoundly passionate temperament broke loose, he could roar betimes as gently as a dove. Yet, when I last heard him in Paris, the few remaining pupils of Chopin declared that he was brutal in his treatment of their master. He played Rubinstein, not Chopin, said Georges Mathias to me. Mathias knew, for he had heard the divine Frédéric play. Nevertheless, Rubinstein played Chopin, the greater and the miniature, as no one before or since.

To each generation its music-making. The "grand manner" in piano playing has almost vanished. A few artists still live who illustrate this manner; you may count them on the finger of one hand. Rosenthal, d'Albert, Carreno, Friedheim—Reisenaur had the gift, too—how many others? And these artists are not now in their best estate. Paderewski emulates the big style, I am told; but this magician never boasted a fortissimo arrow in his quiver. He is said to pound at times. I can't vouch for this, for I have not heard him play in this city for more than a dozen years, but I did hear him play in Leipzig in 1912 at a Gewandhaus concert under the baton of the greatest living conductor, Arthur Nikisch, and I can vouch for the plangent tone quality and the poetic reading he displayed in his performance of that old war-horse, the F minor concerto of Chopin. Furthermore, my admiration of Paderewski's gift as a composer was considerably increased after hearing his Polish symphony interpreted by Nikisch. How far away we were from the crudities of "Manru." Joseffy, who looked upon Paderewski as a rare personality, told me that the Polish fantasy for piano and orchestra puzzled him because of its seeming simplicity in figuration. "Only the composer," enthusiastically exclaimed Joseffy, "could have made it so wonderful."

But the grand manner, has it become

too artificial, too much of the rhetorical? It has gone out of fashion with the eloquence of the old histrions, probably because of the rarity of its exponents; also because it no longer appeals to a matter-of-fact public. Liszt was the first. Liszt was a volcano; Thalberg—his one-time rival—possessed all the smooth and icy perfection of Nesselrode pudding. Liszt in reality had but two rivals close to his throne—Karl Tausig, the Pole, and Anton Rubinstein, the Russian. Von Bülow was all intellect; his Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, and Brahms were cerebral, not emotional. He had the temperament of the pedant. I first heard him in Philadelphia in 1876 at the Academy of Music. He introduced the Tchaikowsky B flat minor concerto, with B. J. Lang directing the orchestra, a quite superfluous proceeding, as von Bülow gave the cues from the keyboard and distinctly cursed the conductor, the band, the composition, and his own existence, as befitted a disciple of Schopenhauer. Oh, he could be fiery enough, though in his playing the fervent note was absent, but his rhythmic attack was crisp and irresistible. Two years later, in Paris, I heard the same concerto played by Nicholas Rubinstein at the Trocadéro, (Exposition, 1878,) the very man who had first flouted the work so rudely that Tchaikowsky, deeply offended, changed the dedication to von Bülow.

Anton Rubinstein displayed the grand manner. Notwithstanding the gossip about his "false notes," (he wrote a Study on False Notes, as if in derision,) he was, with Tausig and Liszt, a supreme stylist. He was not always in practice and most of the music he wrote for his numerous tours was composed in haste and repented of at leisure. It is now almost negligible. The D minor concerto reminds one of a much traversed railroad station. But Rubinstein the virtuoso! It was in 1873 I heard him,

but I was too young. Fifteen years later or thereabout he played his Seven Historical Recitals in Paris and I attended the series, not once, but twice. He had a ductile tone like a golden French horn—Joseffy's comparison—and the power and passion of the man have never been equaled. Neither Tausig nor Liszt did I hear, worse luck, but there were plenty of witnesses to tell of the differences. Liszt, it seems, when at his best, was both Rubinstein and Tausig combined, with von Bülow thrown in. Anton Rubinstein played every school with consummate skill, from the iron and inflexible certitudes of Bach's polyphony to the magic murmurs of Chopin and the romantic rustling in the moonlit garden of Schumann. Beethoven, too, he interpreted with intellectual and emotional vigor. Yet this magnificent Calmuck—he wasn't of course, though he had Asiatic features—grew weary of his instrument, as did Liszt, and fought the stars in their courses by composing. But his name is writ in ivory, and not in enduring music.

Scudo says that when Sigismund Thalberg played, his scales were like perfectly strung pearls; with Liszt the pearls had become red hot. This extravagant image is of value. We have gone back to the Thalbergian pearls, for too much passion in piano playing is voted bad taste today. Nuance, then color, and then ripe conception. Technique for technique's sake is no longer a desideratum; furthermore, as Felix Leifels has wittily remarked, "No one plays the piano badly"; just as no one acts Hamlet disreputably. Mr. Leifels, as a veteran contrabassist and at present manager of the Philharmonic Society, ought to be an authority on the subject; the old Philharmonic has had all the pianists, from H. C. Timm, in 1844—a Hummel concerto—to Thalberg and Rubinstein, Joseffy, Paderewski, and Josef Hofmann. Truly

By James Gibbons Huneker

Weimar, when in the palmy days every other pianist you met was a natural son of Liszt—or else pretended to be one—he has more than a moiety of that virtuoso's genius. He is a great artist, and occasionally the magic fire flares and lights up the firmament of music.

I think it was in 1879 that Rafael Joseffy visited us for the first time; but I didn't hear him till 1880. The reason I remember the date is that this greatly beloved Hungarian made his debut at old Chickering Hall, (then at Fifth Avenue and Eighteenth Street;) but I saw him in Steinway Hall. Another magician with a peculiarly personal style! In the beginning you thought of the aurora borealis, shooting stars, and exquisite meteors; a beautiful style, though not a profound interpreter then. With the years Joseffy deepened and broadened. The iridescent shimmer was never absent. No one has ever played the E minor Concerto of Chopin as did Joseffy. He had the tradition from his beloved master, Tausig, as Tausig had it from Chopin by way of Liszt. (Tausig regretted that he had never heard Chopin play.) Joseffy, in turn, transmitted the tradition to his early pupil, Moriz Rosenthal, in whose repertoire it is the most Chopinesque of all his performances.

In the same school as Joseffy is the capricious de Pachmann; with Joseffy I sat at the first recital of this extraordinary Russian in Chickering Hall. (1890?) Joseffy, with his accustomed generosity of spirit—he was the most sympathetic and human of great virtuosi—recognized the artistic worth of Vladimir de Pachmann. This last representative of a school that included the names of Hummel, Cramer, Field, Thalberg, Chopin, the little De Pachmann (he was bearded like a pirate) captivated us. It was all miniature, without passion or pathos or the grand manner, but in its genre his playing was perfection; the polished perfection of an intricately carved ivory ornament. De Pachmann played certain sides of Chopin incomparably. In a small hall, sitting on a chair that precisely suited his fidgety spirit, then, if in the mood, a recital by him was something unforgettable.

After de Pachmann—Paderewski. And after Paderewski? Why, Leopold Godowsky, of course. He belongs to the Joseffy-de Pachmann, not to the Rubinstein-Joseff Hofmann group. I once called him the superman of piano playing. Nothing like him, as far as I know, is to be found in the history of piano

playing since Chopin. He is an apparition. A Chopin doubled by a contrapuntalist. Bach and Chopin. The spirit of the German cantor and the Polish tone-poet in curious conjunction. His playing is transcendental; his piano compositions the transcendentalism of the future. That way, else retrogression! All has been accomplished in ideas and figuration. A new synthesis—the combination of seemingly disparate elements and styles—with innumerable permutations, he has accomplished. He is a miracle worker. Dramatic passion, flame, and fury are not present; they would be intruders on his map of music. The piano tone is always legitimate, never forced. But every other attribute he boasts. His ten digits are ten independent voices recreating the ancient polyphonic art of the Flemings. He is like a Brahma at the piano. Before his serene and all-embracing vision every school appears and disappears in the void. The beauty of his touch and tone are only matched by the delicate adjustment of his phrasing to the larger curve of the composition. Nothing musical is foreign to him. He is a pianist for pianists, and I am glad to say that the majority of them gladly recognize this fact.

One evening several Winters ago Godowsky was playing his piano sonata with its subtle intimations of Brahms, Chopin, and Liszt, and its altogether Godowskian color and rhythmic life—he is the greatest creator of rhythmic values since Liszt, and that is a large order—when he was interrupted by the entrance of Josef Hofmann. Godowsky and Hofmann are as inseparable as were Chopin and Liszt. Heine called the latter pair the Dioscuri of music. In the Godowsky apartment stand several concert grands. Hofmann nonchalantly removed his coat and, making an apology for disturbing us, he went into another room and soon we heard him slowly practicing. What do you suppose? Some new concerto with new-fangled bedevilements? O Sancta Simplicitas! This giant, if ever there was one, played at a funereal tempo the octaves passages in the left hand of the Heroic Polonaise of Chopin, (Opus. 53.) Every schoolgirl rattles them off as "easy," but, with the humility of a great artist, Hofmann practiced the section as if it were still a stumbling block.

De Lenz records that Tausig did the same. Later, Conductor Artur Bodanzky of the Metropolitan Opera dropped in, and several pianists and critics followed, and soon the Polish pianist was playing

for us all some well-known compositions by a certain Dvorsky; also an extremely brilliant and effective concert study by Constantin von Sternberg. From 1888, when he was a wonder-child, Jozio Hofmann's artistic development has been logical and continuous. His mellow muscularity evokes Rubinstein. No one plays Rubinstein as does this Harmonious Blacksmith—and with the piety of Rubinstein's pet pupil. I once compared him to a steam-hammer, whose marvelous sensitivity enables it to crack an egg-shell or crush iron. Hofmann's range of tonal dynamics is unequalled, even in this age of perfected piano technique. He is at home in all schools, and his knowledge is enormous. At moments his touch is as rich as a Kneisel Quartet accord.

At the famous Rudolph Schirmer dinner, given in 1915, among other distinguished guests there were nearly a score of piano virtuosi. The newspapers humorously commented upon the fact that there was not a squabble, though with so many nationalities one row, at least, might have been expected. A parterre of pianists, indeed, some in New York because of the war, while Paderewski and Rosenthal were conspicuous by their absence. Think of a few names: Joseffy—he died several months later—Gabrilowitsch, Hofmann, Godowsky, Carl Friedberg, Mark Hambourg, Leonard Borwick, Alexander Lambert, Ernest Schelling, Stojowski, Percy Grainger—the young Siegfried of the Antipodes—August Fraemcke, Cornelius Ruebner, and—another apparition in the world of piano playing—Ferruccio Busoni.

This Italian, the greatest of Italian piano virtuosi—the history of which can claim such names as Domenico Scarlatti, Clementi, Martucci, Sgambati—is also a composer who has set agog conservative critics by the boldness of his imagination. As an artist he may be said to embody the intellectuality of von Bülow, the technical brilliancy of the Liszt group. Busoni is eminently a musical thinker.

America will probably never again harbor such a constellation of piano talent. I sometimes wonder if the vanished generation of piano artists played much better than those men. Godowsky, Hofmann, Harold Bauer, the lyric; the many-sided and charming Ossip Gabrilowitsch, Hambourg, Busoni, and Paderewski are not often matched. Heine called Thalberg a king, Liszt a prophet, Chopin a poet, Herz an advocate, Kalkbrenner a min-

strel, (not a negro minstrel, for a chalk-burner is necessarily white,) Mme. Pleyel a sibyl, and Doehler—a pianist! The contemporary piano hierarchy might be thus classed: Josef Hofmann, a king; Paderewski, a poet; Godowsky, a prophet; Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler, a sibyl; d'Albert, a giant; Busoni, a philosopher; Rosenthal, a hero, and Alexander Lambert—a pianist. Well, Mr. Lambert may be congratulated on such an ascription; Doehler was a great technician in his day, and when the "friend of pianists" (Lambert could pattern after Schindler, whose visiting card read: "l'Ami de Beethoven") masters his modesty an admirable piano virtuoso is revealed. So let him be satisfied with the honorable appellation of "pianist." He is in good company.

And the ladies! I am sorry I can't say, "place aux dames!" Space forbids. I've heard them all, from Arabella Goddard to Mme. Montigny-Remaury, (in Paris, 1878, with her master, Camille Saint-Saëns;) from Alide Topp, Marie Krebs, Anna Mehlig, Pauline Fichtner, Vera Tininoff, Ingeborg Bronsart, Madeline Schiller, to Julia Rivé-King; from Cecilia Gaul, Svarvady-Clauss to Anna Bock, from the Amazon, Sofie Menter, the most masculine of Liszt players, to Antoinette Szumowska-Adamowska; from Ilonka von Ravacs to Ethel Leginska—who plays like a house afire; from Helen Hopekirk to Katharine Goodson; from Clara Schumann to Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler, Olga Samaroff, and the newly come Brazilian Guiomar Novaes—the list might be unduly prolonged.

Not only do I fear prolixity, but the confusing of critical values, for I write from memory, and I admit that I've had more pleasure from the "intimate" pianists than from the forgers of tonal thunderbolts; that is—Rubinstein excepted—from such masters in miniature as Joseffy, Godowsky, Carl Heyman, de Pachmann, and Paderewski. In conclusion, I find in the fresh, sparkling playing of Mischa Levitski and Guiomar Novaes high promise for their future. The latter came here unheralded and as the pupil of a sterling virtuoso and pedagogue, Isidor Phillipp of the Paris Conservatory. It is noteworthy that only Chopin, Liszt, and von Bülow were Christians among the supreme masters of the keyboard; the rest (with a few unimportant exceptions) were and are members of that race whose religious tenets specifically incline them to the love and practice of music. Selah!